320.942
Guel Pol
27163

THE
ASIATIC SOCIETY OF BOMBAY
Town Hall, Bombay.

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 05 April, 2016

THE

POLITICAL SITUATION

AN ADDRESS

BY

JOSEPH GUEDALLA,

Vice-President of the Reform League.

27163

DELIVERED TO A MEETING OF WORKING MEN.

AUGUST 24, 1868.

LONDON:
LONGMANS, GREEN, READER, AND DYER.

1868.

320.942
Fuel Pol
27163

THE POLITICAL SITUATION.

In addressing you this evening on public affairs, it will be my endeavour to place before you some facts and some considerations which, at so critical a juncture as the present, I venture to think, should be borne in mind by the great mass of the people.

Let us glance, in the first instance, at the state of things which obtained prior to the autumn of 1865, when the death of Lord Palmerston abruptly dispelled the false and unnatural calm which had too long been allowed to prevail. For years, the question of Parliamentary Reform had been made the plaything of Cabinets and the sport of parties. Dissimilar in many other respects, all the efforts to extend the franchise had alike been marked by a singular absence of earnestness and reality. They appeared to possess the advantage of creating a pleasurable excitement while they lasted, and causing no vain regrets when they failed. In one case, it is true, the country had been appealed to, and its decision, resulting in abdication of office, had been accepted. But in this case, the course had only been adopted as the desperate expedient of a Ministry placed in a minority, and starved out for a principle and a policy. The exception, therefore—if such it can be termed—was scarcely calculated

to raise the moral tone of our politics. Indeed, the Whig leaders evinced a sympathetic appreciation of the motives actuating their opponents; and when themselves compelled to introduce a Reform Bill, they gave a tacit consent; although they commanded a majority, to the measure being talked away by easy stages and in the most amicable manner. After this farce had been duly gone through, the "rest and be thankful" doctrine was proclaimed and practised; and the pastime of framing Reform Bills was left to private members, who, at least, brought to the task a sincerity to which their chiefs could lay no claim. Now, if any one man was to be held responsible for the deplorable position of affairs into which we had drifted, that man most certainly was Lord Palmerston. By the display of qualities which Mr. Disraeli has since shown himself so well capable of improving upon—by the demoralizing influence he exercised upon his colleagues—by the paltry arts he employed with both sides of the House of Commons—by the hollow glitter of frankness with which he surrounded his utterances—and, above all, by the garb he assumed and the trust he abused, Lord Palmerston succeeded in rendering useful legislation impossible, and in bringing discredit and disgrace upon the very name of Liberalism. Far too sagacious not to have perceived that changes were impending and inevitable, he deliberately staved off the hour of action, in order to avoid the unpleasant necessity of disturbing comfort and imperilling place. What can be urged on behalf of a Minister who, controlling the destinies of a great nation, and aware that delays were fraught with danger, only cared to restrain the storm till it could no longer burst

over his head, or affect his interests? We live in days when it is well to avow the conviction that wily management does not constitute statesmanship, and that time-serving is incompatible with patriotism.

Owing to the discouragement attending previous attempts, and to the absorbing regard manifested in the progress of a terrible struggle on the other side of the Atlantic, no formidable agitation had been set on foot during the period referred to. But, with the accession of Lord Russell to the Premiership, matters commenced to wear a brighter aspect. The Government announced the intention of bringing in a Reform Bill, and, further, of standing or falling by it. This declaration—made to a deputation from the Reform League—did much to revive confidence in public men, and to awaken the hopes of sincere Liberals. Without wishing to detract from the personal merits of Lord Russell, there is little room to doubt that the guiding spirit of his Administration was Mr. Gladstone. Secure in the gratitude and the affectionate esteem of the large majority of his countrymen, Mr. Gladstone cannot be reached by calumny or injured by falsehood; to him imputations of selfish designs can be, and are, matters of the most perfect indifference. It is, however, a significant answer to his present traducers that in 1866, in the first session of a new Parliament and a new leadership, he immediately and energetically sought to give effect to his avowed principles. If ever plausible excuses for hesitancy existed, they existed then. Reasons for procrastination would have required no elaborate invention; they were there to hand. But the statesman who had made the noble declaration that every man not incapacitated by crime

or mental deficiencies, must be morally entitled to the franchise, was not to be turned aside from his purpose by the menaces of open enemies or the machinations of false friends. It is easier far to lower than to raise the tone of a Legislative Assembly; and when we recall to mind how systematically the House of Commons had been schooled into neglecting its duty and ignoring its dignity, we shall be better able to understand and appreciate the nature of the work undertaken by Mr. Gladstone. The Liberal benches contained scores of occupants, who, returned as supporters of Lord Palmerston, were bent on following in his footsteps and on sparing no exertions to frustrate a Liberal policy. The Bill introduced, small in its provisions, was correctly said by Mr. Bright to be honest in its conception. It was, moreover, altogether free from those vexatious restrictions with which baffled injustice contrives to hamper a right it does not dare to withhold. In good faith the compromise was offered to us, and in good faith by us it was accepted. For Tory blindness, combined with Liberal treachery, was it reserved to cause its rejection and the resignation of the Government, and to ensure even something more than that—to ensure for the admirers of class ascendancy as prompt a retribution, as crushing a defeat, as bitter a humiliation, as any men have ever had deservedly to suffer.

The popular movement which ensued, after the formation of the Derby-Disraeli Ministry, will be memorable in our annals. Grand in its spontaneity and its dimensions, it evoked an outburst of enthusiasm such as had not been witnessed in this generation. From platform after platform there rang out, not unmingled with warn-

ing, the demands of a people, wearied of waiting and passive no longer. The arguments finding most favour were similar to those which, when employed by Mr. Gladstone in Parliament, had been disdainfully sneered at as "flesh and blood" arguments. For the Liberal leader to have pleaded, in the presence of a distinguished audience, that the fact of the toiling masses being of one order of creation with their aristocratic rulers, might well induce to generous treatment, was considered to have been on his part an intolerable indulgence in sentimentality and an unpardonable offence against good taste. But, with truer, if less refined, instincts, the working classes especially applauded the views which made reference to the nation's manhood rather than to bricks and mortar, or to rating and rental. It soon became apparent, from the practical features of the agitation, and from the prudence and unanimity throughout characterising its proceedings, that the Government in office must either bend or break —that it must either accede to the cry for Reform or cease to exist in the act of refusal.

Were the spirit of our Constitution complied with, no government could exist whose members were not the recognised leaders of a majority of the House of Commons. That is the principle of representation carried to its legitimate issue, and any departure from it involves us in difficulty and confusion. Exceptional circumstances may occasionally arise; but surely that is no sufficient cause for our applying a perilous and unconstitutional remedy. The evils resulting from the Queen's advisers representing the will and possessing the confidence only of a minority are obvious. A Ministry, so situated, has unavoidably to select one of two courses—

to submit to be defeated in the first important division, or to resort to means, which cannot be otherwise than questionable, for enticing from their allegiance some of the forces of its opponents. The Ministers, on their acceptance of office, are able distinctly to perceive the extent of their venture, with its probable consequences and its possible disasters. From the first to the last moment of their uncertain tenure of power, their policy must be rickety, and they must wait on events instead of endeavouring to shape them. With persons placed at a disadvantage, through no fault of their own, the sternest amongst us can feel sympathy; but for those who, to grasp what the world calls splendid prizes, voluntarily put themselves in a false position, it is hard to entertain any sentiment save that of contempt. The present Administration is the latest instance on record of ruling by minority; and what its career has been is known to all. Doubtless, several of its members would gladly make heavy sacrifices to be relieved from the odium and responsibility of its acts. Prudence, however, can now avail them nothing. They elected to risk their stakes, and the game happens to have gone against them.

In order to comprehend the Conservative tactics of 1867, it is necessary to take into account the tendencies of the Conservative leader. From the front opposition bench, Mr. Disraeli had long enjoyed the benefit of silently studying the devices by which Lord Palmerston maintained undisputed sway. Possessed himself of a genius, an unfailing audacity, and a fertility of resource to which Lord Palmerston never could have pretended, he most likely entered upon his leadership in June, 1866, with a

confident belief that, in the disturbed relations of parties, his acquirements and experience could be rendered peculiarly valuable and peculiarly advantageous. It is not improbable that, in spite of his egregious failure in 1859, Mr. Disraeli had secretly clung to the idea of being the author of a Reform Bill. Such an authorship was best calculated to satisfy that feverish craving after historic fame, so notable in his composition. As the head of a hopeless minority, he might also have been reasonably disposed to trust something to luck, and a great deal to that which has for him an almost irresistible allurement —dishing the Whigs. Besides, his genius delights in daring and dissimulation, in surprise and strategy. Like the stormy-petrel loves to seize the prey cast up by the raging waters, so Mr. Disraeli values a victory most when it is snatched amid general confusion and universal bewilderment. Of course, his own statement at Edinburgh, that for a lengthened period he had contemplated the introduction of Household Suffrage, implies that his Parliamentary utterances, expressly directed against a lowering of the Suffrage, were so many idle, unmeaning words; that, in fact, they had had uses in their season, but could with convenience be further dispensed with. I fortunately have these Parliamentary orations in their collected form, and as I pore over certain of the passages and compare them with the Edinburgh speech, I cannot help imagining the language of lofty rebuke and virtuous indignation that would be employed, by Tory squires, swelling with respectability and magisterial importance, if some luckless bumpkin, placed before them, stood self-convicted in his evidence of inconsistencies, immeasurably less gross and immeasurably less palpable.

According to Rochefoucault, hypocrisy is a homage which vice pays to virtue. I am very far from asserting that Mr. Disraeli is all vice, or that his supporters are all virtue; but, undeniably, hypocrisy is the homage which, whenever Reform has been upon the tapis, the latter have received from the former. The session before last was, in this respect, similar to other sessions, with one simple distinction—that to gratify a vague desire and a cheap ambition, Mr. Disraeli then saw fit to show his hand and box the compass. On the assembling of Parliament, the Minister, in lisping accents, and with a charming naïveté, invited the House into his confidence; and from that hour the Conservatives were led on, gently, gradually, almost imperceptibly to a goal which, had it been thrust upon them by ruder hands, they would assuredly have shrunk from with alarm and dismay. Both in 1859 and 1868 ridiculous and abortive measures were brought forward. In the first instance, the attitude of Mr. Disraeli's party forbade his attempting to prolong his Ministerial existence by indulging in strategic movements; in the second instance, he was enabled to effect repeated changes of front, to permit with complacency the so-called checks and fancy franchises to be indiscriminately and mercilessly destroyed, to register most of the decrees of the Opposition, and to conclude the campaign by cajoling or coercing his ducal colleagues in the Upper House not only into taking the required leap, but into racking their brains for arguments with which publicly to justify and support it. Whence came this astonishing improvement in Conservative discipline and docility? It was due, let me answer, to the earnestness of Mr.

Gladstone, the eloquence of Mr. Bright, and the educational instrumentality of the Reform League.

The Tories did not dislike Household Suffrage less; they feared a determined people more. Thus it was that they consented to be dragged at the chariot wheels of Mr. Disraeli; although when they did so consent, they little conceived the rattling pace that would be maintained or the extent of ground that would be traversed. With overwhelming odds opposed to them, with consternation reigning in their midst, with defeat, if not destruction, threatening their wavering columns, their only hope not unnaturally appeared to them to consist in reposing an enforced reliance in their appointed general. At the expense of what credit for honesty and truthfulness he possessed, that leader availed himself of the situation which others had created, doing our work, and strengthening his own momentary hold of office. Household Suffrage—clogged with rate-paying restrictions which we must hasten to remove, and unprotected by the ballot which we must hasten to secure,—is now the law of the land. I put it, however, to you, as upholders not more of our national liberties than of our national morality, whether you would not rather have waited even longer for the boon you sought, and had virtually acquired, to have obtained it in a manner more honourable and from hands more pure. I care for no party monopolies, and would deny to no party the right, fairly and manfully, to reverse its traditional policy. But I say it is an evil thing for a country—a thing we may contemplate as much in sorrow as in anger—when some of its statesmen do not scruple to filch, at the eleventh hour, from their opponents the conduct of a

great question, and to endeavour, without a single word indicative of change of opinion, to conceal the theft they are perpetrating, by pouring forth on these very opponents torrents of vituperation and abuse. In 1866, all Reform was decried, and on that ground a Liberal Ministry was ejected from power; in 1867, Household Suffrage was adopted, and Mr. Bright's arguments and conclusions were unceremoniously appropriated. Did the Conservative press alter or abate its insolent and insulting tone towards Mr. Bright? On the contrary, its envenomed attacks became, if possible, more frequent and more fierce. It is, as we have been told, good to be praised by those whom all men should praise; it is better to be reviled by those whom all men should scorn. If Mr. Disraeli and his followers—if the duper and the duped—can derive pleasure from their humiliation and satisfaction from their retrospect, we, certainly, shall not disturb them in an enjoyment which it is difficult to understand and impossible to envy.

I have thus far dwelt exclusively on England and her politics. Let me now speak of that unfortunate land which has served to brand our name with infamy throughout the world. The past of Ireland has been one long, weary, unbroken night, redeemed by no glimmerings of hope, by no glimpses of sunshine. Her history is a history of misery and suffering, of blood and tears. Bound down with a chain of iron, her voice has been stifled, her aspirations have been crushed, her Church has been placed under the ban of outlawry, her land, again and again, has been confiscated, her industries have been neglected, her resources have been undeveloped, and her people—one of the bravest and

the best on earth—have been remorselessly driven into rebellion or into exile. Hating England with the unconquerable hate of despair, thousands in each generation have preferred to perish by English bullets rather than live under English rule. From orators, from philosophers, from poets, we have been wont to hear the same sad record of wrong and agony; and still—notwithstanding the constant hearing of that cruel record,—we have remained pitiless and inactive. The chosen champions of oppressed nationalities, the friends of Circassia, the aiders of Poland, the patrons of Italy—what have we done within our own borders to allay, and, it might be, remove, the discontent which has deadened the energies and cankered the heart of Ireland? What, indeed! Catholic emancipation—which still remains to be carried out in its entirety—is the first and the last measure adopted by Parliament worthy of the name of conciliatory legislation. Leaving Ireland to languish with a placidly-expressed kind of belief that happiness and prosperity were not ordained and could not be made to smile upon her, we have directed our attention to more congenial topics. Especially, have we deemed it our mission to hold up to execration the tyranny of foreign States, whose condition, of course, offered so painful and so remarkable a contrast to that of the Elysian realms in which it was our good fortune to dwell.

In truth, we have never learnt the lesson that the interests and the welfare of Ireland are identical with our own. Take the question of expenditure. British taxpayers cannot be reminded too often, and are reminded far too seldom, of the outlay incurred in policeing and dragooning the sister country into tranquillity. The cost

to the National Exchequer of prisons and barracks and fortifications, of maintaining 30,000 troops and military police, and of stationing a large number of war vessels to watch the Irish sea-board, cannot fall short, exclusive of what is met by local rates, of £8,000,000 per annum. Then we have also to guard the Canadian frontier, and to send gunboats on special service into North American waters. Successive Secretaries of State have recommended emigration as a panacea for Ireland's sufferings, but the fact of our having to lend the colonists Imperial protection against the violence and the vengeance of Irish exiles, conclusively demonstrates that the pet scheme is as impracticable and worthless as it is criminal and unnatural. To misgovern first, and to depopulate afterwards, the country you have impoverished by your misgovernment, is truly, in this latter half of the nineteenth century, an edifying spectacle. And when you have succeeded in forcing Irishmen to quit their native land, what have you in reality accomplished? You have sent them to a home across the ocean whence, laughing at your threats and defying your penal laws, they can advantageously wage against you an unceasing war. Depend upon it, that Irishmen, be they where they may, will never forget Ireland; and so long as their memories continue affectionate and faithful, so long emigration must fail, as it has failed hitherto, to restore peace and harmony to the British dominions.

The Fenian conspiracy—marked by some acts both wicked and wanton—has done this good service: it has forced upon Parliament and the nation the serious consideration of the state of Ireland. In the session that has just closed, Mr. Disraeli, having attained the summit

of his ambition, did not evidently care to rashly risk what it had needed such toil and scheming to acquire; he saw, no doubt, that the Conservative party, recently deceived, was now more than usually wary. He therefore contented himself with putting up poor Lord Mayo to sound public opinion as to the expediency of levelling upwards; in other words, as to the expediency of trying to purchase Roman Catholic acquiesence in the continuance of the establishment facetiously called, the Irish Church, but neither called, nor pretending to be, the Church of Ireland. Public opinion did not hesitate to express its condemnation of the proposition shadowed forth; and since then, the Premier has unvaryingly confined his operations, to criticising, and, as far as he has been able, obstructing the policy of justice and conciliation initiated by Mr. Gladstone. With ardent sympathies, with unsurpassed abilities, and with a ripe experience, Mr. Gladstone is fitted beyond compare for the Herculean labour of healing Ireland's wounds, and of causing to be dealt out to her an open-handed justice. The Liberal leader has wisely pronounced the doom of the Protestant State Church in Ireland; for were that allowed to remain, it would be absurd to suppose we could convince our Irish brethren that we were sincere in our regrets for the past, or serious in our promises for the future. So much having recently been uttered in reference to the subject, it would be profitless and wearisome repetition for me to enter at any length into the reasons which clearly point to the dis-establishment and disendowment of the Irish Church as the primary step in reconciling Ireland and in consolidating the strength of the Empire. Surely, the figures of

the census of 1861, which show that in Ireland there are 693,357 members of the Established Church, and 4,505,265 Roman Catholics, are sufficiently eloquent and sufficiently conclusive. Where they fail, words can be of little use. The Irish Church is beyond propping and patching; it was founded by conquerors for the purpose of mocking and insulting the sentiment of the conquered; and thus founded, can it be matter of surprise that it has been a fruitful source of alienation, estrangement, and disaffection? Such a weed cannot exist in an atmosphere of civil and religious liberty; and as, in these islands, freedom is now something more than a figure of speech, the Irish Church in the natural order of things is tottering to its fall. To endow other sects and place them by its side would be to cause fresh animosities, to create fresh abuses, and to make confusion worse confounded. The friends of the Irish Church have mainly restricted their defence to impugning the motives and assailing the characters of the Liberal chiefs. Whether this has proceeded from the badness of the brief or the incapacity of the advocate, I am not prepared to decide; but I can undertake to summarise the debates of last session by saying, that all the argument was on one side, and all the scolding on the other. The only shreds of ideas that have been vouchsafed, and that have been trumpeted forth as appeals to the bigot and the coward are, that in destroying the State Church in Ireland we are undermining the State Church in England, and are materially assisting the spread and growth of Popery. Now, I do not hesitate to confess that I am opposed on principle to all State endowments, and am of those who believe that establishments cannot compare, in the results

achieved, with what has been termed the giant of voluntaryism. I can discover, however, no analogy—no point of similarity—between the Irish and English Churches, between that which would not be, and is not, tolerated in semi-civilized communities, and that which is closely akin to the religious institutions of the majority of monarchical Governments. Much, very much, has to be done before the English Church need be put upon its trial. That day can scarcely be otherwise than remote; and, in any case, it will neither be hastened nor retarded by our pursuing a course, demanded not more by equity than by decency. The Popery cry has excited no enthusiasm, and has kindled no zeal. The Conservatives sent up a rocket, and after it had idly fizzed and whizzed in the air without producing the least effect, the burnt and charred stick has come back to them. Englishmen are well aware that the secret of the power possessed by the priests in Ireland has been owing to the ability of the people in their suffering and their oppression to turn to their spiritual instructors for comfort and consolation. Take away the suffering, take away the oppression, and at the same time you take away the exceptional influence of the priests. The kindliest relations would continue to exist between these good and charitable men and their flocks; but their authority in matters political would be entirely gone. If the decision as to the fate of the State Church in Ireland rested with the Sovereign Pontiff, it is my abiding conviction that his voice would at once be raised in favour of the perpetuation of an establishment, which helps more than aught else to drive the Irish masses into the arms of his clergy, and which places Protestantism and Catholicism side by side, in lights

so serviceable to his interests and so agreeable to his taste.

In rejecting the Suspensory Bill, the House of Lords has simply referred the whole question of the Irish Church to the court of final appeal—the constituencies. It is subject for sincere congratulation that the question has to be fought out at the hustings; for the decision which will assuredly be registered will do more to weld two nations into one than all the parliamentary enactments that could possibly be passed. The message will be a direct message of peace and good-will from the people of England to the people of Ireland. Other reforms—especially in the vital matter of land tenure—must follow; our countrymen may rest assured that Mr. Gladstone will persevere untiringly in the noble task he has made his own.

Last year Mr. Disraeli was content to force his services upon us, and be instrumental in carrying Household Suffrage; this year he has been compelled, by the insubordination of his colleagues and the watchfulness of his party, to resort to the old do-nothing Tory policy. Levelling upwards was tried, but, beyond the Treasury Bench, did not find any supporters. The Premier has wriggled about uncomfortably in the restricted line of action to which he has been confined, and has relieved his agony of mind by unravelling the terrible and mysterious conspiracy which exists between the Ritualists and the Romanists, and which—strangest of all!—no one seems to heed besides himself. Mr. Disraeli, in short, obstructs our advance, and must be conquered and removed—must be relegated to the cold shade of Opposition, where he will be able undisturbed to continue to go

through his sorry antics, and perform in his new and original character of Defender of the Faith.

To ensure success, we must look well to our organisation in the approaching general election. I sincerely trust that the American caucus system will be shortly introduced into this country; it is, beyond doubt, the most equitable and most efficient system yet devised. It would give the working classes a commanding influence they can never otherwise possess. At present we have on our side numbers and energy and earnestness. Let us recollect, however, that unity and discipline are the first conditions of ultimate triumph. No constituency ought to be divided in the Liberal interest. Wherever there are more than the requisite number of candidates presenting themselves, a meeting of the Liberal electors should be held, its opinion taken as to the representatives it desires, and its decision rigidly enforced. From this rule there can and must be no departure. The candidate who has the presumption to oppose it, is placing considerations of self above considerations incalculably greater and more important. By that very act, he proves his unfitness for the trust he solicits. There can only be one explanation of his declining to leave his claims on the constituency in the hands of a gathering of Liberal electors; and that is, that he hopes to be returned by a mixed vote of Liberals and Conservatives. To the latter, therefore, let such a candidate restrict his attentions, and let Liberal countenance and support be unhesitatingly withdrawn from him. The constituency which does not oblige Liberal candidates to arrive at an understanding before going to the poll will run a serious risk and will incur a serious responsibility. We must, furthermore, be careful,

in the process of selection, not to tie or weaken tne hands of Mr. Gladstone. There are Liberals and Liberals. We have been taught—and there is no probability of our forgetting the lesson—that with too many candidates independence implies trickery, and moderation means treachery. In a democracy like that which we aspire to become, and are becoming, crotchets and whims and individual views must sink into insignificance, and must not for a moment be permitted to interfere with the difficult work which lies before us. Mr. Gladstone is our leader, and they who would solicit our suffrages must undertake to yield him an unswerving allegiance, not because he chances to be a party chief, but because he is the pioneer of a great movement.

Campbell declares in one of his poems that "coming events cast their shadows before." If their shadows be composed of predictions and speculations, the ensuing elections can claim an unwonted share. Among other of the prophecies with which we have been flooded, one was lately made to the effect that the next Parliament will consist principally of young lords and elderly soap-boilers. This is a result which, for my own part, I do not expect. I am tolerably confident that the notion so fondly nursed in certain quarters that the change effected in the first Reformed Parliament will be hardly visible, is doomed to sure and speedy disappointment. Notwithstanding the bribery and flattery and intimidation which will be attempted, I anticipate that there will be as complete an alteration in the character of the men returned as in the character of the legislation which the country will require of them. But I would urge upon you to bestir yourselves in two

respects; first, to send to Parliament, free of expense, some of your own order; and, secondly, to prove your worthiness for the franchise, by returning in an equally dignified manner some of the distinguished writers and thinkers who have helped you to obtain it. There not being as yet payment of members, working men could not go to St. Stephen's in any numbers. Still, it would not necessitate any superhuman efforts for the millions of British toilers to send and support there a dozen at least of the industrial class. As a question of expenditure, they would be repaid ten thousand times over, and they would have done much to add to the usefulness of the House of Commons, and to strike down those artificial barriers which divide and distract our national councils. The working classes being supreme in many boroughs and powerful in all, where, too, I would ask, are the honoured names of their friends and advisers—of such as Thorold Rogers, and Beesly, and Harrison? I have not seen those names; I have not even heard them mentioned in connection with a seat in Parliament. How and why is this? They are men who will not come to you—you must go to them. You can confer on them no fresh eminence, but you can do yourselves much credit. They are ready in season and out of season to give you their aid when you need it. They adhere, however, to the principle of constituencies asking the services of members, not of members asking the services of constituencies. Be it yours, then, to see that men thus capable of serving you shall receive a token of your esteem, which, freely and frankly offered, cannot fail to be cordially and cheerfully accepted.

Radicals in the past have been too often guilty of

27163

doing what we must carefully avoid in the future—charging at windmills. For example, some tell you to abolish the House of Lords. If you take care, instead, to control the House of Commons, you can render the House of Lords as purely and harmlessly ornamental as the gilded chamber in which it meets. When measures of graver import shall have been disposed of, it will be time to consider about life-peerages, and to examine, closely and critically, into the constitution of the Upper House. In the meanwhile, as our hereditary law-makers cannot shoot all the year, it is only reasonable to let them have some occupation in the metropolis, which, amusing them, shall not harm us. Then others tell you that the land is the property of the people. Now, the dreams of communists may be exalted dreams, but they are none the less dreams incapable of realisation. You have not the means, even if you have the right, to seize the land. What you can and must do is this—abolish the laws of primogeniture and entail, the laws relating to the preservation of game, give good legal security to the tenant, and direct your legislation to the end of encouraging the creation of a peasant proprietary. In such manner, with time and patience, you will best forward the wise and large-hearted views of Canon Girdlestone as to the improvement of the condition of the agricultural labourer, and you may hope to bring about hereafter free trade in land. Foremost among the subjects on which your voices must be heard with no uncertain sounds, stand a reduction and a re-adjustment of taxation, and the framing of an adequate scheme of national education. It has over and over again been stated that our country is at once the richest

"and the poorest in the world. It has been asked, how is it, that while the rich and those who have already enough grow daily richer, the poverty of those who are miserably poor remains entirely undiminished? But is not the one a sequel to the other? Is not our great wealth the veritable cause of our great poverty? In the language of the poet:—

> "Proud swells the tide with loads of freighted ore,
> And shouting folly hails them from the shore;
> Hoards e'en beyond the miser's wish abound,
> And rich men flock from all the world around.
> Yet count our gains. This wealth is but a name,
> That leaves our useful products still the same.
> Not so the loss. The man of wealth and pride
> Takes up a space that many poor supplied;
> Space for his lake, his park's extended bounds,
> Space for his horses, equipage, and hounds.
> While scourged by famine from the smiling land
> The mournful peasant leads his humble band;
> And while he sinks, without one arm to save,
> The country blooms—a garden and a grave."

A reduction of taxation and an extension of education cannot accomplish everything, but they can accomplish much. We are taxed £70,000,000 annually for Imperial purposes, and £20,000,000 for local purposes. How frequently there are murmurings and complaints about the local rates, and how very seldom comparatively—except when the income tax is in question—do we hear any remonstrances in reference to the Imperial expenditure, which is ordinarily sanctioned with the utmost *nonchalance* by half a score of sleepy members! Shall I tell you the cause of this distinction? It is the immediate effect of indirect taxation, whereby you are unable to

ascertain to what extent you have been taxed—if, indeed, the fact of your being taxed occurs to you at all—and, hence you become careless and indifferent. Indirect taxation was invented by legislators, desirous of saving their own pockets and robbing yours. Under direct taxation, every man would have to pay according to his means; under indirect taxation every man has to pay according to the number of mouths he has to feed. Under direct taxation, the rich would have to bear the chief burden; under indirect taxation, by far the principal weight is thrown upon the poor. Tea and coffee, sugar, cocoa, and chicory —all necessaries of life to the working classes—produced last year to the revenue nearly £11,000,000. Thus do the wealthy few escape, and thus are the struggles of the struggling many rendered harder and more severe. The Grosvenors have become millionaires through chancing to own a part of London, and the Stanleys have acquired their wealth through chancing to own a part of Liverpool. Who have made London and Liverpool the busy and prosperous cities that they are? Who, but the industrial classes? I should like to have the income of any one of you placed by the side of the income of the Marquis of Westminster or the Earl of Derby, and then have a calculation gone into as to the proportionate amounts paid by each to the national revenue. You would discover that you had not only built up the fortunes of these noblemen, but that you had also paid their taxes for them. To do justice to ourselves and those who will come after us, we must revert to the fiscal system which was in vogue when the world was younger and perhaps more honest. By open and direct taxation,

let every man contribute as he is able to contribute; and let this system, in its fulness, apply alike to peer and peasant.

The money, unjustly raised, is still more unjustly spent. The outlay this year incurred on our military and naval establishments and on fortifications is £29,117,531. The interest on the National Debt reaches to £26,571,750. The total, therefore, of what we are forced to pay in twelve short months for wars past, present, and prospective is £55,689,281. If there is anything which could induce the working classes to consider as to whether they are morally bound to pay a debt, in the accumulation of which they had no part, and which was mainly incurred with an object odious to them—that of trampling out democracy on the Continent of Europe, it is the enormous and ruinous sums which are now wasted on army, navy, and fortifications. My respected friend, the Rev. Henry Richard, handed me, the other day, a statement he had drawn up, which shows that the cost of eight wars, with the interest on the loans, cast out at 3½ per cent., from 1688 to 1856, amounts to no less than £4,234,435,000. During the last fifty-four years—supposed to have been, on the whole, a period of peace—the army and navy have consumed £1,063,232,139; and the interest on the National Debt during the same time has amounted to £1,529,032,268. Since the fortification mania set in, in 1861, we have sunk in fortifications £5,030,000. These fortifications are fitting memorials of panic and cowardice. Competent authorities have pronounced them to be worse than useless; and a minister of the Crown, from his place in Parliament, informed us last session that at Portsmouth—where

two-thirds of the money has been spent—they can only serve to guide an enemy into the harbour. I wish you to bear in mind that all this has been done, and is being done, while men and women and children are perishing of want; while the country is burdened with twelve hundred thousand paupers; while trade is so stagnant and employment is so scarce that the young and the hardy almost fail to earn a livelihood. The possession of armaments, moreover, conduces to bloodshed—it is a standing temptation to governments to have recourse to the arbitrament of the sword. Wars may gratify the lust or the ambition of monarchs, but from their subjects is exacted a penalty, heavy indeed. Whatever else gains by wars, liberty must always lose. Turn over the records of the past, and you will find that, as a rule, momentous and important struggles have been followed by the assured destruction of free institutions. Despotisms may need bayonets to sustain them; democracies, whether republican or monarchical, can have no such need. Through your representatives, you must insist that reforms be inaugurated in the army and navy, by a reduction of both services to at least a fourth of their present strength. The Bill of Rights of 1690 expressly prohibits a permanent army; and there is no reason why we cannot comply with its provisions, and trust a citizen army in preference to an army of mercenaries. The mercantile interests are entitled to a sufficient number of ships to guard their commerce. Beyond this, however, our naval requirements should not extend; and we should squander no more on experimental iron-clads, or on fortifications which merely suffice to display the silliness of their authors and to excite the mirth of foreign critics. The

strivings of parties to outbid each other by promising temporary and insignificant reductions, are scarcely likely to meet the requirements of the case. Our energies must not be expended on trifles; it is the system itself which we must attack and destroy. Hitherto, in our public services those who have had the pay have not had the work, and those who have had the work have had a very moderate share of the pay. If we are to have reductions at all, let us have them to the extent of £15,000,000 or £20,000,000, and let us make them, not by grinding down starving letter-carriers or under-paying industrious subordinates, but by a wholesale abolition of sinecures, by declining to support aristocratic paupers and needy adventurers, and by entering upon a truly pacific policy. It is to be hoped that the day is not distant when a serious endeavour will be made to establish Courts of Arbitration for the settlement of international disputes. That would be a solution of the problem, simple and effective; it would establish among states a code of laws externally similar to that operating internally; it would remove the incubus which weighs us down; and it would carry joy and contentment into tens of thousands of homes now blank and desolate.

In the matter of education, as in most other matters, the presence of our oligarchical form of government has caused itself to be apparent and felt. Special care has been taken of, and special provision has been made for, the education of the aristocracy, so that they should be competent to retain in their hands the administration of the country, and bequeath unimpaired to their descendants the monopoly of power which they themselves had inherited. Their schools and their universities have

wanted for nothing that money could purchase or foresight secure. On the merest hint, Parliament has been invariably ready to afford these institutions the promptest, the most ungrudging assistance. But dominant classes cannot reckon on supremacy solely from their own elevation; they must also be able to count upon the abasement of the people, so as to avoid that dead level —whether of excellence or the contrary—of which they are at no pains to conceal their abhorrence. What, then, has been the education of the masses? how has it been fostered? how promoted? Hear the reply from the pen of an observant American, Theodore Parker:

"While the nobility and gentry are the flowers of the State, the common people are only the leaves, and therefore thought of small importance in the political botany of the nation. Their education is amazingly neglected; is mainly left to the accidental piety of private Christians, to the transient charity of philanthropic men, or the self-interest of mechanics and small traders who now and then found institutions for the education of some small fraction of the multitude. But such institutions are little to the liking of the Government, or the spirit of the ruling class; gentility does not frequent them, nor nobility help them, nor royalty watch over to favour and to bless. The Parliament which voted one hundred thousand pounds for the Queen's horses and hounds had in the same session but thirty thousand to spare for the education of her people!"

Of late years, improvements have been made, and larger sums have been granted: but nothing has been done on any commensurate scale. We have no technical schools, nor have we schools for a purpose which is a first necessity—that of instructing and sending forth a large and qualified staff of teachers. The ordinary schools we possess are thinly scattered, are ill conducted, and are frequently inconveniently situated. You should

prize the suffrage for nothing so much as that it will enable you to diffuse knowledge throughout the land, and to throw open to the poor all seminaries of learning, from the majestic colleges of Oxford down to the humblest village school. The schoolmaster abroad is the protector of liberty and the promoter of equality. Without education, Great Britain cannot keep its ancient place among European powers; and without education, whatever the political rights accorded to you, as a class you must remain as hewers of wood and drawers of water. A system of secular and compulsory education is best adapted to our emergencies. Theological and sectarian topics should not be mixed up with the other branches of education. It is to the advantage of the most pious parents for their children to receive their religious training as altogether distinct from their general training. We must have compulsion, not that we need fear it will have to be frequently employed, but in order to affirm the principle of the State's liability to educate before it proceeds to punish. Schools and prisons cannot flourish together; and with more schools we shall require fewer prisons.

Let us endeavour to rise to a true—to a statesmanlike—conception of the causes which alone can produce, which alone can perpetuate, the greatness of nations and the glory of empires. Let us learn to distinguish between shadow and substance, between the fame conferred by the barren, nay, mischievous triumphs of war and the fame earned by the fruitful and beneficial achievements of peace, between the vanity which creates unwise social distinctions and the enlightenment which would unite

all sections into one, between the splendour that dazzles and the happiness that lasts, between the luxury of a class and the interests of a people. The real secret of a nation's life is to be found in that magic word, contentment; and frail must be the tenure of existence held by a State, volcanic, indeed, its principal component elements, when without sufficient or even visible effort, the saddest, the most degrading, the most disheartening poverty is permitted to continue comparatively unchecked by the side of an unrivalled commerce and a fabulous wealth. It has ever appeared to me that power should be desired by communities as by individuals, solely for the privilege afforded of doing good, and that power, neglected or abused, must recoil with a terrible force upon its possessors. We are too apt to mistake pomp for grandeur, and gigantic armaments—the symbols of weakness—for the symbols of strength. A Government, be its citizens many, or be they few, which adequately provides for their educational and material wants, profitably employs the resources at its command, and, in a large sense, seeks to develop the general industry and promote the general welfare, although possibly such a Government may scarcely realise our accepted ideas of what constitutes power, yet it is none the less possessed of the surest guarantees of a prosperous and prolonged existence; for healthful and vigorous, it performs its allotted task and worthily fulfils its mission. In England, a submissive majority has yielded homage to an insolent minority—the feudal system dead centuries ago in form has never been banished in spirit. The consequences, if deplorable, have been not only natural but inevitable. Now, the time

has come to bring about a change in the whole tone and character of our legislation. The opportunity has arisen; have the men also arisen who are willing and able to avail themselves of it? Two paths are marked out for us to enter upon, and from the direct issues they involve there is, and can be, no escape. The one path, constructed by hypocrisy to allure folly and intolerance, takes us back to the dark policy of a bygone period, and brings us to the brink of a precipice, in which may well be wrecked the fairest hopes and the loftiest aspirations. To follow it means to place brute force above eternal justice; to increase, instead of atoning for, the cruel wrongs of the past; to invite oppressive measures for England as well as for Ireland; to substitute a blind and fatal obstinacy for a noble and generous conciliation; to scorn our national honour, and to defy our progressive civilization. The other path leads us, through no tortuous windings, into safety and into light. Not merely does it rid us of a grave anomaly and a dangerous evil; it unmistakably indicates, and is intended to indicate, the commencement for these realms of a new era of peace and promise. In the language of one of the most gifted of living orators, it enables us to perceive, as it were, above the hill-tops of futurity, the dawning of a brighter and a better day. Are we, then, to advance, or are we to recede? This is the question presenting itself for the nation's verdict. Never was a more momentous and a more solemn question asked of a great people; may it be, that never was there returned a nobler, a readier, and a more encouraging response. Invincible in our resolve to drive forth from these islands the grim phantoms of discord and despair, to sweep away iniquitous badges of

servitude, and to maintain a well-ordered freedom, we feel that we are pressing on to certain victory. In our ranks, however, there must be no apathy, no indecision, no indifference. Let none falter in the work; let none fall out by the way. Of those who have come forward, in spite of contumely and misrepresentation, to guide us to a truer national life than we have yet attained, I would say, that although they may not be destined to see reaped all the blessings that they sow, they will, at least, have done this—they will have discharged a sacred duty to their consciences and their country, and they will have triumphantly vindicated the statesmanship of our age. Believe me, history will know how to speak of these men, and to the end of time, their names and their memories will be reverenced and treasured up by a grateful posterity.

JUDD AND GLASS, PHŒNIX PRINTING WORKS, DOCTORS' COMMONS.

00027163

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 05 April, 2016